

# Lying

## For children ages 3 – 5

*Lying is common in childhood. Children may stretch or change the truth, make-up stories or simply deny what an adult knows to be true. But this is not really lying. The difference is in the intent. Real lying is when someone says something they know to be false in order to hide the truth.*

### Why Do Children Lie?

Here are some reasons why children may lie:

**Fear.** Kids fear disappointing their parents and being punished. They learn if they didn't do something wrong their parents won't get upset and they won't be punished.

**Copying.** Kids hear adults lying and think it is okay. Adults may tell a "white lie" or offer an excuse for not doing something. But kids do not know the difference between different kinds of lies.

**Habit.** Lying can simply become a habit if done often enough.

**Wishing something were true.** Kids simply want something to be true. Saying it out loud helps the child believe it. For example when your child says "I didn't do it" and you know he did.

### Should A Lie Be Punished?

There is no easy answer to this question. You as a parent may say you are punishing your child for lying. But your child may think the punishment is not for the lie itself, but for being found out. If your child is lying because of fear of being punished, punishing your child may increase the likelihood of your child lying in the future!

### When Lying Becomes Serious

#### For Older Children

Sometimes lying is a sign that something else is wrong. Children who lie all the time may also be having trouble with:

- Stealing and cheating
- Anger
- Skipping school
- Making friends and other social situations

Talk to your child's doctor about these concerns.

### What Can Parents Do?

**Try to find out the reason for the lie.** This will help you know what to do about it.

**Help your child understand what really happened.** Wishing or saying something didn't happen won't change the fact that it did. Try saying "Even though you say you didn't track mud through the house, look, there's the mud and your shoes are dirty."

**Be kind when your child makes little mistakes.** Help your child see what went wrong, but let your child know that it is safe to tell the truth. Reassure your child that you won't get mad when you hear what really happened.

**If your child did something wrong, help fix the problem.** If your child tracked mud through the house, clean it up together. Your child will learn that mud really did get all over the floor.

**Praise your child for telling the truth.** Help your child understand that what he did may have been wrong, but that telling the truth about it was good. If your child admits to tracking mud through the house, say "Thank you for telling me the truth. But you did get the floor muddy and you'll need to help me clean it up."